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GENUINE ART VERSUS MECHANISM

If we study the word "art" and its etymology we find that it means in general, skill—skill in making, arranging, or fitting something; skill in the attainment of a desired end; skill in mental as well as in manual labor. As there is always a best way for doing anything, the perfection of it is an art; and the one who does it best, an artist.

There are artists in all trades, as well as in all professions where mind or imagination is chiefly concerned. Poetry, music, painting, sculpture, and architecture are commonly called the fine arts. The word art has also often been applied specially to the art of drawing and painting in all their different phases, so that to say a person is engaged in art work often means only some kind of work in the "graphic arts."

We find that art means skill, but in the fine arts this is but one of the elements. There is an emotion, a poetical feeling, which is common to all true artists, and all real works of art are the expression of this. Different definitions or interpretations of art are given by different writers. It has been called imagination, the sense of the beautiful, a language. Art can express itself by means of sounds in music, by means of words in poetry, or in painting by means of forms and colors.

The source of art is the perception of the beautiful, the emotion which the artist feels in the presence of nature, and works of art are the outcome of his desire to express that emotion. Art is nature seen through the mind of the artist and no artist sees exactly what another has seen.

We may learn something more about what art is by recalling what it is not. We know that it is not imitation, neither mere technique, nor mere talent, nor inspiration. Imitation is not the supreme aim of art, or, as Taine says, "Photography would be superior to painting, and the court reports, where every word and gesture are carefully noticed, the greatest literary works."

There is some imitation in art, but perfect exactness is not art. Art is sometimes purposely inexact. Michel Angelo's figures would not express such strength and power if they were mere copies from nature. A sketch has often more value than a finished picture, because it shows only the principal characteristics of the subject.

Even in photography perfect exactness, as it is obtained by instantaneous process, sometimes spoils the general effect. Photographs of horses taken while they are running at full speed do not give the



FLYING CLOUDS—PAINTING
By Charles H. Davis

effect of speed at all. The form and position of the horses' bodies at a given second are really very different from what they appear to be to one watching them.

The best works in photography are not perfect imitations. The photographer is more or less an artist in his way of posing, arranging, and finishing. He can attain beautiful results in his line and his art can also be very helpful to the painter, but that help has been greatly misunderstood and misused.

We see to-day a deplorable tendency to combine the two arts of painting and photography, a process resulting in productions that lack whatever merit either art ought to possess. I hope the time will soon come when portraits, which are enlarged photographs, finished with more or less skill in black crayon or some colored medium, will not be endured upon their walls by people who lay claim to any refinement or taste.

The picture may be like a friend, or rather, like the photograph of a friend. It would be a wonder if it were not, since it is partly the work of excellent machinery, but that very likeness stamped upon anything so inartistic makes the effect all the more painful.

The cheapness of such pictures ought to warn us against them. Are they not often advertised as given away for the sale of the frame? Is not the hand-work upon them done mostly by men and women who never had any art training at all? If we cannot afford portraits painted by artists of some taste and education, why not be satisfied with photographs, which can be very artistic in their way?

The fear has sometimes been expressed that photography would in time entirely supersede the art of painting. Some people seem to think that when the process of taking photographs in colors has been perfected and made common enough, the painter will have nothing more to do. We need not fear anything of the kind. Perfection in photography may rid us in time of all the poor work done in color. The work of the artist, however, in which is seen his own individuality, his own perception of the beautiful, his own creation in fact, can no more perish than the soul which inspired it.

HENRIETTA CLOPATH.



END OF A NOVEMBER DAY—PHOTOGRAPH
By Frederick K. Lawrence